

## **Minutes August 14, 2008**

## **Facilitation of Community Choices Committee**

The Committee met in the Town Room, Town Hall. The meeting was called to order at 9:05

Members Present: Alison Donta- Venman, Stan Gawle, Isaac Ben-Ezra, Gerald Jolly, Martha Hanner, and Katherine Vorwerk- Feldman Members Absent: Bob Saul, Richard Spurgin and Irvin Rhodes

Others Present : Stephanie O’Keeffe, Joan Golowich, Helen Vivian, Robert Detweiler, Wendy Kohler, Elaine Brighty and Andy Steinberg.

**Announcements:** Joan Golowich was introduced as our newest member ; Bob Saul will be interviewed on ACTV by Isaac Ben-Ezra August 28<sup>th</sup>; and Stephanie O’Keeffe commented on her report to the SelectBoard at their last meeting.

**August 7, 2008 Minutes:** On a motion by Alison Donta- Venman and a second by Stan Gawle, the minutes were approved as distributed

**July 31,2008 Minutes:** Approval of draft minutes was postponed

**Presentation of Enhanced School Scenarios:** Wendy Kohler reviewed the process that she and Russell Vernon-Jones utilized in developing the lists of restorations and additions to the minimal, adequate and optimal enhancements budget scenarios.

In the area of **staffing**, the goal was to preserve and retain class sizes at the elementary level ( kgn=21; Gr1-2= 22; Gr 3-6= 23. At the **regional level**, there are up to 40 classes that have 25 students; students aren’t allowed to double up on core subjects and can’t take 2 languages. Alison Donta-Venman requested a current class size profile.

**Texts and Supplies :** Texts in science and social studies are outdated anywhere from 5 years to decades.

**Mandates :** An example of an un-funded mandate is the increase from 20 to 30 hours that every teacher in regular ed and second language learners must receive in additional training.

**Under-funded mandates:** A reduction from \$90,000 to \$17,000 in an entitlement fund for MCAS related support for after school and summer sessions will result in servicing only high school students.

**New Initiatives:** Distance learning, utilization of sophisticated technology and starting Chinese and Spanish early in the elementary levels

**Over-all cuts:** The schools have been cutting for the past 5 years, but have attempted to protect the classroom funding as a high priority . Class sizes are up and choices are down. With less choices , out migration to charter schools increases. Fees have been increased .

Wildwood and Fort River are in need of major renovations.

A possible re-organization of the elementary schools is being studied

### **Outreach Subcommittee Report:**

There will be no mass mailing of a questionnaire. An on-line questionnaire will be developed and posted on our new website Amherst Choices.Org.

Public Forums: At least two large public forums will be held. The 1<sup>st</sup> one to be held in the first week of October and televised via ACTV was agreed to by the over-all group . Two smaller meetings in October spread geographically with a smaller group discussion format were also discussed. Stan Gawle suggested that the Senior Center be possibly utilized as one of those smaller meetings. Joan Golowich agreed to do follow-up with the Senior Center.

Isaac Ben-Ezra will follow-up with the NAACp and Jerry Jolly agreed to contact the Rotary for possible speaking engagements.

An open mike call-in forum at ACTV was also discussed.

There was a discussion of possibly doing a telephone or other survey to elicit community response. Andy Steinberg agreed to follow-up with possible leads at the University and Hampshire College

**Data and Presentation Committee Report:** The committee reported that materials for a slide show and handouts has been developed. The next meeting will be on August 18<sup>th</sup> and will focus on developing a series of questions and answers that will try to anticipate some of the questions that the public will ask.

Meeting adjourned at 11:05 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Stan Gawle